

# EC470: The City in Economic History

Colby College  
Fall 2019

Seminar: Tuesday 1:00-3:30 in Diamond 341

Research lab: Thursday 1:00-2:15 in Diamond 341 (unless otherwise announced)

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Office hours: Monday 3:00-4:00; Tuesday 11:00-12:00; Wednesday 1:30-2:30 (or by appointment)

## Course Description

Since its founding, the U.S. has steadily become urbanized. What economic forces have caused people to move to cities? Can history explain today's urban locations and spatial patterns? Questions like these motivate the study of cities in the field of economic history. Focusing primarily on U.S. urban growth since 1800, students will read, present, and discuss academic articles on topics such as suburbanization, zoning, local infrastructure investment, urban quality of life, housing, and racial and economic inequality across space. Students will build up the economic models and tools necessary to complete the primary requirement in the course, which is to write an original empirical research paper in urban economic history.

## Learning Goals

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Critically engage with cutting edge research in urban economic history.
2. Apply critical economic thinking to a variety of urban and historical contexts.
3. Formulate an economic research question, take it to data, and communicate your findings.
4. Write more persuasively on economic concepts, data, and historical context.
5. Understand the long-run development of urban economies.

## Course Expectations

Expectations for me:

1. I will come to class prepared and ready to engage with you about the material.
2. I will assess your work in a timely manner.
3. I will design lectures, discussions, and assignments around the learning goals above.

Expectations for you:

1. Come to class prepared and ready to engage with me and your classmates about the material.
2. Work diligently on class assignments and complete them on time.
3. Ask questions both inside and outside of class.

## Course Structure

Assignments will be constructed to help you accomplish the learning goals stipulated above. Class meetings will be intellectual exchanges driven primarily by students through presentations and discussions. Research lab meetings will be mostly structured to help you make weekly progress on your projects. I will provide you with details and readings for the lab by email as we go. In order to make class and lab meetings great experiences for the class, as well as vibrant learning environments, your active engagement and participation is expected.

## Prerequisites

EC224: Microeconomic Theory and senior standing as an economics major is required. The course will also feature a significant amount of quantitative empirical work, and so the ability to evaluate such work is necessary. Thus, completion of—or concurrent enrollment in—EC393: Econometrics is required. Please come see me if, at any time in the course, you feel rusty in interpreting empirical results.

## Materials

The readings for this course will primarily be articles in scholarly journals. In most cases, you are expected to retrieve the articles yourself. When doing so, be careful that you find the **final published version** of each article we read, rather than a 'working paper' version (you'll know it's a working paper if it has no citation information). There are a couple working papers on the reading list; in these cases, I have posted the articles on Moodle. There is no formal textbook for the course, although I have book recommendations if you would like to explore some of the ideas more deeply.

## Grading and Requirements

Your course grade will be determined on a standard scale by class participation, discussions, written responses to class readings and a visitor talk, and a final research project. All required assignments are due in class on the research lab day (see course schedule). The final paper is due Monday, December 9 by 5pm. Late assignments will be docked a letter grade each additional day they are late. The following is the breakdown of the course:

Discussions: 20%

Participation: 15%

Weekly written responses: 15%

Visitor talk attendance (Thursday, November 7 at 4pm; lab class cancelled) and written response: 5%

Research project: 45%

- Research proposal: ungraded
- Extended proposal and data summary: 5%
- Working paper: 7.5%
- Peer review: 5%
- Final presentation: 7.5%
- Final paper: 20%

Discussions: On three occasions, you will be responsible for leading the class through the discussion of academic articles assigned for reading. Each discussion should last about 40-45 minutes. You will guide two discussions in a group and guide one discussion on your own. You will discuss the article's main ideas, concepts, methods, and data, as well as facets of the writing. Discussion guidelines are provided on Moodle.

Participation: Courses in the style of a seminar rely heavily on participation from students in order to be successful. Your participation grade will reflect your attendance, contribution to class discussions, demonstrated knowledge of the readings, and your performance on lab and course assignments throughout the semester. Discussions may go beyond the assigned readings, and I encourage you to think "outside the box" when it comes to evaluating the readings and adding to the discussion. Your comments should be respectful and appropriate to the readings, with full and undivided attention given to your classmates when they are leading a discussion or giving a presentation. The best way to prepare for class each day is to reflect on the questions given in the discussion guidelines posted on Moodle. Discussants will use these questions in leading class discussions. Aim to be able to answer them so that you can help your classmates out when they ask questions and help keep the discussion lively. Much of your participation score will be based on your direct participation in class discussion, so use the discussion guidelines as a resource (a "cheat sheet") for ensuring success in doing so.

Weekly written responses: For each article we read, you will be responsible for answering the following questions, each in 2-5 sentences:

1. What is the most important table or figure in the text? Why? If there are no figures or tables (or you feel that they are not important), then what is the most important idea?
2. What didn't you understand in the paper?

The aim of these questions is to ensure that you have given thought to the article and to allow me to see if there are any misunderstandings that should be addressed in class. However, note that simply answering the questions will not adequately prepare you for class discussion (see participation section above). These questions must be submitted in hard copy form (typed or handwritten) to the box outside my office by **4pm sharp** the Monday before class. *Note: you do not need to complete weekly responses for an article you are discussing.*

Written responses to visitor talk: These responses will describe the main ideas, concepts, methods, and data presented by the visitor. I will also provide some prompts to think about while attending the talk; these will help guide you in your response.

Research project: The capstone experience in the seminar is the production and presentation of an original research paper in urban economic history. The paper should be structured like an academic paper in economics and be quantitative in nature. The final paper should not exceed 15 double-spaced pages and must exhibit standard margins, font, and font size. The following framework is a guideline in writing the paper: introduction and (brief) literature review, data description and/or background information, analysis, and conclusion. The total project is worth 45% of your course grade, and will be composed of the following parts (in order of completion):

- 1) Research proposal: discuss why your research question is interesting and important, what your hypothesis is, how you intend to test or investigate it, and what data you will use.
- 2) Extended research proposal and data summary: this assignment is meant to ensure that you have made good progress on collecting the data necessary to complete your paper, as well as on developing its main questions, arguments, and hypotheses.
- 3) Working paper: this is a complete draft on which I and one of your peers will provide feedback to incorporate into your final paper.
- 4) Peer review: in this review, you will read and provide 2-3 pages of comments and feedback on a classmate's working paper.
- 5) Presentation: the presentation will be approximately 15 minutes in length.
- 6) Final paper: the final paper should be original, well-structured, and incorporate feedback from your working paper, peer review, and presentation.

Re-grade requests: You may resubmit any graded material with an additional sheet attached clearly explaining why you deserve a better grade. These requests are due within one week after the graded work is returned. If you choose to petition for a change to your grade, I will re-grade the *entire* work, not only the part in question. Remember, you are assessed on what is actually written on your paper, not what you meant to write.

### **Policies**

Office hours: Please make use of my office hours to answer any and all questions you have about the course and the material. If you cannot reach me during my office hours, please email me to schedule an appointment.

Email: I aim to return emails within 24 hours. I usually respond more quickly than that, but sometimes it is not possible given semester schedules and daily obligations.

Disruptive behavior: Behaviors that are disruptive to teaching and learning will not be tolerated. Such behavior includes talking in class, use of electronic devices, and coming to class late or leaving early. I discourage the use of smartphones and laptops. It is distracting for those around you, for lecturers, and can be distracting for you. There is also empirical evidence that students learn better and remember more by taking notes by hand. If you have a legitimate reason to use a cell phone during class, come late, or leave early, please let me know prior to lecture. Also, unauthorized audio and/or visual recording of the class is prohibited. Please see me if you have concerns about anything mentioned here and I will work with you to support your learning needs.

Diversity: It is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit.

Class attendance: Although I do not take attendance, you are expected to attend all classes and scheduled course events during the semester and are responsible for all material assigned as readings and discussed in class. Unexcused absences from required events will result in a grade of 'zero.' If you are going to miss a class or event because of an extracurricular event or observance of a religious holiday, please let me know within the first two weeks of class.

Academic honesty: I take academic dishonesty very seriously and believe strongly in the values articulated in the Colby Affirmation. Although you are encouraged to work and study with each other, ALL work submitted must be your own. Plagiarism, fabrication, cheating, and facilitating the academic dishonesty of others are serious offenses for which you will fail the course (or worse). Therefore, you should become familiar with the College's policy on academic dishonesty and the Colby Affirmation, which is found in the Colby Student Handbook.

### Course Schedule and Readings

The course will feature 11 focused topics. If you would like to explore more within each topic, please come see me. A good place to start to find more material is with the reference section of a particular paper you find interesting. All readings will be discussed by me, you (individually), or your group. Each reading is marked accordingly. We will assign articles at a later date.

Week	Date	Topic	Paper Assignments
2	Sep 10	Introduction to Urban Growth	
3	Sep 17	The Structure of Cities	
4	Sep 24	The Persistence of Place	
5	Oct 1	Railways and Path Dependence in Urban Growth	Research proposal due Oct 3
6	Oct 8	The Urban Mortality Penalty	
7	Oct 15	NO CLASS: Fall break	
8	Oct 22	Postwar Suburbanization	Extended proposal due Oct 24
9	Oct 29	Cities and Markets	
10	Nov 5	Segregation in Cities	
11	Nov 12	Homeownership	Working paper due Nov 14
12	Nov 19	Zoning	Peer review due Nov 21
13	Nov 26	Urban Shocks and Redevelopment	
14	Dec 3	Presentations	

#### Introduction to Urban Growth

- Boustan, L.P., Bunten, D. and Hearey, O. (2018). "Urbanization in the United States, 1800-2000," *Oxford Handbook of American Economic History*. [me]
- Glaeser, E. (2005). "Reinventing Boston: 1630-2003," *Journal of Economic Geography*, 5(2): 119-153. [me]

#### The Structure of Cities

- Atack, J. and Margo, R.A. (1998). "Location, Location, Location! The Price Gradient for Vacant Urban Land: New York, 1835 to 1900," *Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics*, 16(2): 151-172. [me]
- Ahlfeldt, G.M. and Wendland, N. (2011). "Fifty Years of Urban Accessibility: The Impact of the Urban Railway Network on the Land Gradient in Berlin 1890-1936," *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 41: 77-88. [me]
- Gin, A. and Sonstelie, J. (1992). "The Streetcar and Residential Location in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," *Journal of Urban Economics*, 32: 92-107. [me]

### The Persistence of Place

- Bleakley, H. and Lin, J. (2012). "Portage and Path Dependence," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 127(2): 587-644. **[group]**
- Michaels, G. and Rauch, F. (2018). "Resetting the Urban Network: 117-2012," *The Economic Journal*, 128(608): 378-412. **[group]**
- Hanlon, W. (2017). "Temporary Shocks and Persistent Effects in Urban Economies: Evidence from British Cities after the U.S. Civil War," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 99(1): 67-79. **[group]**

### Railways and Path Dependence in Urban Growth

- Berger, T. and Enflo, K. (2017). "Locomotives of Local Growth: The Short- and Long-Term Impact of Railroads in Sweden," *Journal of Urban Economics*, 98: 124-138. **[group]**
- Jedwab, R., Kerby, E. and Moradi, A. (2015). "History, Path Dependence, and Development: Evidence from Colonial Railways, Settlers and Cities in Kenya," *The Economic Journal*, 127: 1467-1494. **[group]**
- Brooks, L. and B. Lutz (2019). "Vestiges of Transit: Urban Persistence at a Micro Scale," *Review of Economics and Statistics*. 101(3): 385-399. **[group]**

### The Urban Mortality Penalty

- Cutler, D. and Miller, G. (2005). "The Role of Public Health Improvements in Health Advances: The Twentieth-Century United States," *Demography*, 42(1): 1-22. **[group]**
- Troesken, W. (2008). "Lead Water Pipes and Infant Mortality at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *The Journal of Human Resources*, 43(3): 553-575. **[group]**
- Beach, B. and Hanlon, W. (2018). "Coal Smoke and Mortality in an Early Industrial Economy," *The Economic Journal*, 128(615): 2652-2675. **[group]**

### Postwar Suburbanization

- Baum-Snow, N. (2007). "Did Highways Cause Suburbanization?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122: 775-805. **[group]**
- Boustan, L.P. (2010). "Was Postwar Suburbanization 'White Flight'? Evidence from the Black Migration," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 125: 417-443. **[group]**
- Boustan, L. and Shertzer, A. (2013) "Population Trends as a Counterweight to Central City Decline, 1950-2000," *Demography*, 50(1): 125-147. **[group]**

### Cities and Markets

- Cronon, W. (1991). *Nature's Metropolis*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.: New York. Various selections (TBD). **[me]**
- Sokoloff, K. (1988). "Inventive Activity in Early Industrial America: Evidence from Patent Records, 1790-1846," *The Journal of Economic History*, 48(4): 813-850. **[individual]**
- Bodenhorn, H. and Cuberes, D. (2018). "Finance and Urbanization in Early Nineteenth-Century New York," *Journal of Urban Economics*, 104: 47-58. **[individual]**

### Segregation in Cities

- Cutler, D.M., Glaeser, E.L. and Vigdor, J.L. (1999). "The Rise and Decline of the American Ghetto," *Journal of Political Economy*, 107(3): 455-506. **[individual]**
- Logan, T.D. and Parman, J.M. (2017). "The National Rise in Residential Segregation," *Journal of Economic History*, 77(1): 127-170. **[individual]**
- Troesken, W. (2003). "The Limits of Jim Crow: Race and the Provision of Water and Sewerage Services in American Cities, 1880-1925," *Journal of Economic History*, 62(3): 734-772. **[individual]**

### Homeownership

- Boustan, L.P. and Margo, R.A. (2013). "A Silver Lining to White Flight? White Suburbanization and African-American Homeownership, 1940-1980," *Journal of Urban Economics*, 78: 71-80. **[individual]**
- Fetter, D. (2013). "How Do Mortgage Subsidies Affect Home Ownership? Evidence from the Mid-Century GI Bills," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 5(2): 111-147. **[individual]**
- Fetter, D.K. (2016). "The Home Front: Rent Control and the Rapid Wartime Increase in Home Ownership," *Journal of Economic History*, 76(4): 1001-1043. **[individual]**

### Zoning

- Fischel, W. (2004). "An Economic History of Zoning and a Cure for its Exclusionary Effects," *Urban Studies*, 41(2): 317-340. **[me]**
- Shertzer, A., Twinam, T. and Walsh, R.P. (2016). "Race, Ethnicity, and Discriminatory Zoning," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 8(3): 217-246. **[individual]**
- Shertzer, A., Twinam, T. and Walsh, R.P. (2018). "Zoning and the Economic Geography of Cities," *Journal of Urban Economics*, 105: 20-39. **[individual]**

### Urban Shocks and Redevelopment

- Hornbeck, R. and Keniston, D. (2017). "Creative Destruction: Barriers to Urban Growth and the Great Boston Fire of 1872," *American Economic Review*, 107(6): 1365-1398. **[individual]**
- Collins, W.J. and Shester, K.L. (2013). "Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal in the United States," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(1): 239-273. **[individual]**
- Collins, W.J. and Margo, R.A. (2007). "The Economic Aftermath of the 1960s Riots in American Cities: Evidence from Property Values," *Journal of Economic History*, 67(4): 849-883. **[individual]**

*To be covered during lab time (details to follow):*

- Siodla, J. (2015). "Razing San Francisco: The 1906 Disaster as a Natural Experiment in Urban Redevelopment," *Journal of Urban Economics*, 89: 48-61. **[me]**
- Siodla, J. (2017). "Clean Slate: Land-Use Changes in San Francisco after the 1906 Disaster," *Explorations in Economic History*, 65: 1-16. **[me]**